

150 Years Abiding in Christ

January 2022. This month (the 28th of this month to be exact) marks the 150th anniversary of the signing of the constitution of St. Johannis Evangelisch-Lutheranisch Gemeinde U.A.C. . 150 years ago, a group of German Lutheran immigrants (via Indiana mainly) who had moved to Platte County near Farley, formalized what had already been occurring in their homes: The blessed Gospel of Christ proclaimed in their house churches, and even in the public-school building when they outgrew their homes.

How fitting with so many founding members knowing something about agriculture they understood the need for nurturing their faith in Christ and their need to establish a congregation and call a pastor. They understood the critical importance of being where Christ had promised to be found – where His Word was proclaimed and sacraments offered. They understood the importance of abiding in Christ.

In our anniversary theme verse of John 15:5 our Lord tells us: *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.* Branches are only living if they are connected to a living tree or vine. Separated from that source of life, the branch is dead and barren.

Our Lord and creator is THE source of Life, (the Tree of Life) the only true source of life, not only physical life (that all things were created through Him and sustained by Him) but especially spiritual, eternal life. The very meaning of our existence is to be connected to/in relationship with the Lord our creator/the Vine. To be separated from that vine/from the Lord of Life is death – physical, spiritual, and eternal.

And tragically, that is exactly the condition each of us was born into this fallen world – dead. When our first parents fell into sin, they cut themselves off from their creator and source of Life and infected all of creation, including each of us their descendants with the deadly disease of sin. It poured through the garden and left all of us as lifeless, dead, dry branches. Oh, we look alive enough, but just think of the miserable, searching, barren, empty lives of the people of this world, seeking in vain to find meaning, purpose happiness--the fruitfulness of Life.

A branch separated from the vine is lifeless--it cannot live on its own, it is dead and empty, and in this picture is suitable only for firewood. The picture is clear: fallen mankind is now suitable only for the fires of hell which was created for the devil and the rest of the fallen angels and are now tragically reserved for all the lifeless branches of creation--those who continue to reject their Living Creator and only source of life.

Yet when the Father/the vine dresser of the Garden saw His infected/dying garden, and wanted to have a new living vineyard, He "planted" the best new vine possible to give Life to His vineyard--one not infected by the disease of sin and death. He planted/buried His Son in the ground to give life again to His creation. Jesus's suffering and dying in our place, giving His own life paid the price we owed for our sinful guilt. But more so, we rejoice in knowing that the Vine of Life also burst forth from the grave – the true Tree of Life Jesus Christ has burst forth from the grave in victory over sin and death and gives forth True Life from Himself. He is the Vine of Life that alone gives life back to the lifeless, the One we must be connected to in order to live.

It was in the blessed sacrament of your baptism that God the Holy Spirit gave you His grace, you a dead, lifeless branch and grafted you into the living vine of Christ. In that water and word, God the Holy Spirit crucified you with Christ. You were connected to His death and payment in your place, His life and righteousness covering your nakedness, shame and guilt. You were also connected/grafted into His resurrection! Grafted into the vine of Christ, you had His life and love flowing into you, flooding you with true life. You were (remade in His image) lovingly made into a living branch, once again bearing fruit of life – love.

As we contemplated a theme for our 150th anniversary, considering our namesake, a verse from the Gospel of John seemed fitting. And the Word of our Lord from John 15:5 (above) seemed particularly fitting and encouraging.

For 150 years, through good times and difficult times, God has graciously given life to the lifeless here at St. John's. He has seen to it that His children, His branches abide in Him through His Means of Grace and abiding in Him He has produced and keeps producing the His good fruit in this Gemeinde (parish), for apart from Him we can do nothing, indeed, we perish. By God's grace, we are 150 years abiding in Christ!

Pastor